

THE
BISHOP OF WATERFORD'S
SERMON &c.

DIE SABBATI, 9 FEBRUARII, 1782.

IT IS ORDERED by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, that the Thanks of this House shall be and are hereby given to the Lord Bishop of Waterford; for his excellent Sermon preached before this House, at Christ Church, the 8th Inst. and his Lordship is desired to Print and Publish the same, and that no Person do presume to Print the said Sermon, but such as his Lordship shall appoint.

W. WATTS GAYER, } Cler.
EDWARD GAYER, } Parliament.



A
S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE
HOUSE OF LORDS,
AT THE
CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST CHURCH,
D U B L I N;

ON
FRIDAY Febr. viii. MDCCLXXXII.

BEING
THE DAY APPOINTED BY AUTHORITY FOR
A GENERAL FAST AND HUMILIATION.

By WILLIAM NEWCOME D. D. *K*
BISHOP OF WATERFORD.

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S E R M O N, &c.

ZECHARIAH vii. 5.

SPEAK UNTO ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND, AND TO THE PRIESTS, SAYING, WHEN YE FASTED AND MOURNED IN THE FIFTH AND SEVENTH MONTH, EVEN THOSE SEVENTY YEARS, DID YE AT ALL FAST UNTO ME, EVEN UNTO ME?

THE fasts, to which the prophet refers, were observed by the Jews during their captivity in Babylon; throughout which period they stately commemorated the subversion of their polity, and their being "scattered," as with a whirlwind, among the nations whom they knew not." We can scarcely conceive a people placed in more awful circumstances. The favoured nation of heaven, among whom God had manifested his
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¹ Zech. vii. 14.

glory by a long series of wonderful interpositions, this distinguished nation was visited with the most fearful judgements; their city and temple were burnt; and those, whom the sword did not devour, were carried away captives into the land of their fierce and scornful enemies. And yet so deeply may depravity be rooted in human nature, that when calamities had subdued their rebellious heart, and, at length, in the dark season of affliction, they sought the God of their fathers, their solemn acts of humiliation were not performed in an acceptable manner. They fasted indeed: but how does God expostulate by his prophet, not only with the people, but even with the ministers of his sacred ordinances? "Did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?"

However we may resemble the Jews of that age in irreligion, and, it's natural attendant, immorality; however both our people, and we, their authorised instructors, whose peculiar duty it is to enforce the best lessons by the best example, may need the most awakening admonitions; blessed be God that there does not subsist a strict parallel between their circumstances and our own. The fate of these nations is depending, and not decided: God may still be entreated for
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us ; if his judgements produce in us their natural effect, and teach us righteousness.

But all must acknowledge that a more alarming period of danger than the present is not recorded in the history of these nations. An empire extensive and flourishing almost beyond example, too much our own pride, and too much the object of envy to every hostile or rival power, this empire, which lately appeared so mighty and so firmly united, is torn asunder, and armed against itself. It is a peculiarly painful and horrid idea, that men, naturally connected by the strongest ties, of the same reformed religion, of the same language and blood, are cutting the sinews of their common strength, and are ultimately making themselves an easy prey to the common enemy. In the course of this most burthenfome, dangerous, and unnatural contest, our most formidable rivals have sacrificed justice to jealousy and revenge in supporting revoltors from their lawful sovereign : our ancient friends and confederates have compelled us to take arms against them : the immediate object of the war has proved unattainable by the most vigorous and persevering exertions of the national strength : two veteran armies have been at first victorious,

without any good effect of victory but the praise of valour ; and, at length, have indignantly surrendered their arms to superior numbers, with every bad consequence of defeat but the ignominy which attends it : the dominion which we have long maintained over our proper element is almost wrested from us by a powerful combination of adversaries, the celerity and force of whose armaments is unexampled in their annals, and perhaps in our own : and one naval defeat might spread wide ruin among our present most valuable territories ; nay, might bring the war to our own dwellings, and subject these countries to all it's horrors. What a contrast is this to the rapidity, extent, and splendour, of our late conquests ! But God's adorable justice and unsearchable wisdom may punish a sinful people by prosperity itself : by the national vices, the national security, and the national pride, which accompany an abundant and continued flow of success. He who is Higher than the Highest seems to have thus addressed us in the language of his own scriptures : " Thou ² that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, and sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else besides me ;" " tho' thou ³ exalt thyself

² Is. xlvii. 8.

³ Obad. 4.

thyself as the eagle, though thou set thy nest among the stars, yet thence will I bring thee down."

It is true that, in the midst of our gloom, there are some considerations which inspire hope: but even these are of a melancholy kind. The morals of our ancient and natural enemies are at least equally corrupt with our own: their national character is further removed from a manly simplicity and sincerity: their atheism is a still more infatuated and debasing species of false philosophy than our deism: and the war, in which they are now engaged, is as unprovoked and unjust as any which disgraces the history of the most perfidious nations. And, however men may differ in their political sentiments on many points, the continuance of the war on the part of the Colonists after such liberal propositions of reunion, and their violation of public faith in the first instance of pledging it, must be condemned by all in a religious and moral view. It is not therefore a mockery of God, but an act of true reverence and humility, when we solemnly refer our cause to the Sovereign Disposer of all events, and beseech him to restore and perpetuate peace: and it must animate our devotions, when we reflect that
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these countries are not responsible for the blood which is now shedding.

But so dark a cloud hangs over us, that we should ask ourselves, with uncommon seriousness, what ought to be our sentiments and conduct on a day of national humiliation. Do we believe that the providence of God superintends human affairs? Our assembling here on the present occasion is a public acknowledgement of this great truth. Do we believe the scriptures? The more accurately we examine them, the more clearly shall we discern the marks of truth impressed on them. Now if God governs the world, the fate of nations is in his disposal: and the scriptures, which are copious on the noblest and most instructive of all topics, the history of the divine Providence and the springs of the divine conduct, expressly assure us that righteous states are the objects of God's favour, and that unrighteous ones derive on them his vengeance.

In so dangerous a crisis then as the present; and with such distinct knowledge of God's providence, and of our own duty, as the scriptures afford us; shall we content ourselves with a formal observance of this day; with interrupting,

ing, for a few hours,, our secular pleasures and pursuits? or shall it be our earnest endeavour so to improve the pious appointment of it, that it may produce solid and lasting effects on our mind and conduct? Shall we fast unto men, who can judge only by external appearances; or unto the Lord, who searcheth the heart?

It is a natural presumption, that the disposition of all here assembled leads them to observe this fast in a truly religious manner: and, that I may assist you and myself on this most solemn occasion, I shall endeavour to shew how we may make this day a real benefit to ourselves, and to the community of which we are members; how we may so humble ourselves before God, as to appease that wrath which is visibly gone forth against us.

By resorting to this place, and jointly offering up our fervent prayers and intercessions to God, we perform one essential part of our duty. Christianity is a social religion; and requires a public acknowledgement, not only of spiritual and personal blessings or wants, but of national prosperity or calamity: It also enjoins a conscientious submission to lawful authority: and whoever
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among us despises the injunction to humble himself this day, and reverently to join his voice with that of his respective congregation, subjects his conduct to the censure of St. Paul, “⁴He that despiseth, despiseth not man but God.”

We should also make a due distinction between this and other days, by such a prudent degree of abstinence as will best dispose us to devotion and selfexamination. This is likewise a duty piously enjoined by our superiors; and therefore both religion and common decency require our performance of it. There are indeed wise reasons, abstracted from the consideration of divine and human authority, why we should sometimes observe days of abstinence. It is fit that we should be occasionally exercised in governing our appetites, that we may acquire the habit of subjecting them to discipline and restraint; and that we should sometimes refrain from what is lawful when considered in itself, that we may enable ourselves to subdue our inclinations towards what is absolutely unlawful, or becomes so from our excessive use of it. The present occasion will naturally suggest to our reflections,

⁴ 1 Theff. iv. 8.

fections, that the abstinence which becomes this day should teach us habitual temperance, and, above all, habitual abstinence from sin.

But these duties of public prayer, and of abstinence suitable to the occasion, are by no means sufficient of themselves. To prayer in the church we must add the devotion of the closet. Prescribed forms of public prayer, though highly useful, are too general to answer every religious purpose. Each man's particular sins must be confessed and deplored in private. Every individual among us should adjust his separate account with God, with his neighbour, and with his own heart. We must each pray against those infirmities to which we are most prone; against those temptations by which we are most easily subdued. And it will become us to offer up our private as well as public intercessions to the Great Arbiter of nations, that he would avert those heavy judgements which threaten these countries; and so bend the hearts of our enemies, or grant us such success over them, that the commotions, which now ravage the world, may end in the propagation of his true religion, the advancement of civil liberty, the prosperity and stability of the

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empire, and the unspeakable blessings of general and lasting concord and amity.

The particular virtue of beneficence to the poor is strongly recommended in the scriptures as proper to accompany fasting. Let us once more attend to the weighty and instructive language of Isaiah on this subject: “ ‘ Is not this a chosen fast, and an acceptable day unto the Lord; that thou deal thy bread to the hungry, when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?’ ” that is, that thou be not careless, or evasive, about relieving those to whom God has imparted the same nature with thyself, and who experience the same feelings of pain and sickness, of hunger and nakedness. Fasting may be called voluntary poverty: but those among us, whose substance God has in any degree prospered, should recollect that the meanest refreshment, partaken of by them on a day of humiliation, exceeds the best which the poor partake of on their day of feasting. Let us therefore, when we thus willingly afflict ourselves for a day, learn to compassionate those who
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necessarily undergo a much greater degree of such affliction every day: and let us consider how acceptable a benefit would be conferred on the poor, or on the prisoner, if what would have constituted the ordinary repast of our families, unless this day had been set apart for a religious purpose, were either in substance or in value allotted to their use.

We of this country have great reason for religious thankfulness, that, amidst the havoc and devastation spread abroad in the world, we have hitherto enjoyed so much national happiness, and so much ability to relieve others. The sword of war has destroyed it's thousands, and it's ten thousands; but it has not approached us. The destroying angel has been sent forth against others in tempests and earthquakes; spreading horror, desolation, and death: while the voice of joy was heard in your dwellings, interrupted only by the humane sensations which such calamities excited, and by "your labour of love" in administering to them such large relief.

But to proceed. That we may observe this fast in a truly religious manner, still more remains to be

done; with respect to which prayer, and fasting, and all positive observances, are subordinate and instrumental duties; and of which beneficence to the poor is only a part, though indeed a leading and essential part. We must reform our lives in every respect; we must be zealous of every good work; and must add to brotherly kindness every branch of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness.

That Christianity has softened and humanised the hearts of its professors, is a fact too evident to be denied by its most shameless adversaries. Witness the abolition and abhorrence of many cruel customs, which formerly disgraced the most polite nations; the number of charitable institutions among Christians; and even their comparatively mild method of waging war. But, it being more easy to relieve our fellowcreatures than to govern ourselves, there are other duties on the performance of which the precepts and motives of Christianity have not had a proportionable degree of influence. Is not the world deluged with blood by the restless ambition of Christian princes, and the insatiable avarice of Christian communities? In the conspicuous stations of life, how rarely do we find a practical
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or even a speculative belief of Christianity, a veneration for the scriptures, a becoming attendance on public worship, stated returns of family devotion, a just discrimination of worthy characters, a steady discouragement of vice, and an eminent example of public and private virtues? And how rarely do we not find a religious scepticism productive of a relaxed morality; an excessive love of the world, a conformity to it's reigning follies and vicious habits, pride, luxury, and what is falsely called the art of living? as if the true art of life did not consist in the practice of duty. Can we look round us without observing the prevalence of selfindulgence and sensuality; the substitution of external accomplishments and ostentatious expence in the place of real worth and solid acquirements; and the frequency of that light and dissipated character, which sacrifices all that is valuable in life, real usefulness and a sense of duty, to an unbounded love of frivolous pleasures and amusements? Are there not many nominal Christians, who are more apt to palliate than to condemn vices which the Apostle says should not be even ⁷ named among the

⁷ Eph. v. 3.

the professors of so pure a religion? Are there not many, who debase the dignity of human nature by an ungrateful abuse of the divine bounty; who habitually violate St. Paul's precept of obtaining "an^s incorruptible crown by temperance in all things;" and who are justly described by another Apostle, "as⁹ thinking it strange that others run not to the same excess of riot with themselves, and as speaking evil" of that virtue which they ought to revere and imitate?

Nor has Christianity duly restrained the malignant passions of anger, malice, and revenge. Are not the pernicious effects of envy, contention, and hatred, every day seen in our intercourse with the world? is not the tongue of slander every day heard, blasting the reputation of men, and disturbing the peace of individuals and families? and have we not constant proof that no station, no character, can exempt men from public defamation; which is every day becoming more indiscriminate, more gross, and more envenomed; and which tramples under foot good order and law, as well as morality and religion?

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^s 1 Cor. ix. 25.

⁹ 1 Pet. iv. 4.

Nor are Christians properly distinguished for a sacred regard to veracity, and for just and righteous dealing in their mutual contracts. Is not perjury, that most daring and destructive species of falsehood, advanced among us to a most alarming height? Is not injustice among the many evils which necessarily attend a prevailing neglect of œconomy? and is it possible, amidst so general a profusion of idle and vicious expence, to observe the Apostle's precepts, ¹⁰ "Render to all their dues," and, "Owe to no man any thing, but to love one another?" Are not the subordinate classes of society, instead of being satisfied with moderate gain, ever intent on defrauding the ignorant, without measure and without remorse? And do we not too often experience, that the restraints of conscience are as little regarded, when opportunities offer of circumventing others, among those whose superior education, and knowledge of duty, should teach them that illgotten wealth preys, like a canker, on the temporal and eternal peace of it's possessor?

In these and the like respects every Christian should examine his heart at such seasons of seriousness

¹⁰ Rom. xiii. 7, 8.

rioufness as the present: and if his conscience should admonish him that he neglects his primary duties to the Great Author of his being, that he gratifies his passions unlawfully, that he wastes life unprofitably, that he indulges a spirit of pride hatred or reviling, or any way injures or defrauds his neighbour; let him be persuaded that, till he forsakes his vices, no prayers, no fasting, no almsgiving will avail him. God's infallible word has passed sentence on him; and has likewise assured him that repentance alone can reverse his condemnation.

Thus far I have considered what should be our conduct on this day in our separate capacity as individuals: I shall now employ a very few words in shewing how we ought to be affected as members of one great community.

In this view we should reflect that, in order to reform the whole, particular persons must reform themselves; and that by religious and virtuous behaviour, by simplicity of life and manners, by industry, œconomy, sobriety, and the like amiable and useful virtues, we not only add one sound
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member to the Christian church, but one good citizen to our country.

Another duty, incumbent on us as members of civil society, is a firm union in these parts of the empire. The more threatening our views are from abroad, the more necessary it becomes to avoid distractions and animosities at home. When the ship is endangered by a storm, shall the mariners separate into adverse parties, instead of employing their joint efforts for the common safety? When the flames are spreading themselves to their habitations, shall fellowcitizens indulge mutual discord, instead of uniting to extinguish them? Such would be our infatuation and madness, if we assisted our enemies, who are already too powerful, in weakening and subduing ourselves by intestine divisions. The wish and aim of all is the security of our religion, liberties, and commerce, by the restoration and continuance of general tranquillity. And how are these ends to be promoted, but by a vigorous exertion of ourselves as one man against our common enemies; and by a just deference to those in authority, as having more accurate and comprehensive views, and clearer sources of information, than can be ob-

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tained by others, who often substitute rumour and conjecture for truth and fact ?

Another duty in our social capacity is unshaken loyalty to our Sovereign. All must have observed the loyal spirit which Christianity breathes. And it is incumbent on us to discharge this duty with cheerfulness ; as the laws of these countries have been the invariable rule of the King's government ; as the prosperity of this kingdom is so manifestly his aim ; and as he exhibits so illustrious an example of piety towards God, and of personal and domestic virtues.

If we thus observe this day, as individuals, by adding to public prayer and discreet abstinence the devotion of the closet, beneficence to the poor, selfexamination, and amendment ; and if we observe it, as members of society, by considering personal virtues as public benefits, by union among ourselves, and by inviolable attachment to our King ; we shall perform our duty as true Christians and true patriots, and we shall contribute our part towards appeasing God's anger, and becoming fit objects of his mercy.

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" He is enthroned above all, maintains harmony in the laws of the material system, and rules in profound peace an inconceivable number of worlds which roll beneath him. May he at length restore peace to this desolated earth. He is perfect goodness; he is the author of all being; and his fatherly mercies embrace the whole creation. But in this world man is the object of his preference, and the image of his Sovereignty. As God has enlightened him with a ray of his intelligence, and impressed on his heart kind affections, may he act as becomes a rational and benevolent being. May man cease to dread the aspect of man: and may weapons of destruction no longer arm his hand against his own species. May nature, bending under the scourge of war, resume new fertility and vigour. May mankind, weakened, exhausted, mowed down in the flower, flourish and multiply under the shelter of peace. May the religion taught by " the " Prince of peace" be every where professed and practised: and when " the " wolf has dwelt with the lamb," when the fierceness of the savage has been softened

¹¹ See the address to the Deity in Buffon's nat. hist. tome ix. p. xviii. 12°. Paris MDCCCLXIX.

¹² *Ib.* ix. 6.

¹³ *Ib.* xi. 6.

ened into Christian gentleness, when " " nation shall not lift up the sword against nation nor learn war any more," may all be reassembled in another state of peace and love unlimited in degree and duration.

" Ib. ii. 4.

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